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ABSTRACT

Presented at a writing center conference by English department faculty members from around the United States--all involved with writing centers--the papers in this collection relate personal experiences and discuss many of the problems faced by writing centers. The ten papers deal with the following topics: (1) the progress and future of writing centers in college English departments, (2) the areas in which writing center staffs are ignorant, (3) experimenting beyond basic grammar instruction, (4) administrative problems at writing centers, (5) overcoming student and faculty resistance to writing centers, (6) defining the role and objectives of a writing center, (7) obstacles in gaining administrative support for a writing center, (8) writing center funding, (9) undergraduate staffing in writing centers, and (10) constant change in writing centers. (HTH)

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER CONFERENCE

held at
The University of Alabama
February 7, 1981

Compiled by:

Gary A. Olson, President
Southeastern Writing
Center Association

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PREFACE

If the First Annual Southeastern Writing Center Conference is any indication, the newly formed Southeastern Writing Center Association will grow to be a strong organization. Repeatedly since the conference, people have congratulated me on the high quality of the papers presented at the meeting. The typical comment has been: "Never have I heard such a high proportion of excellent papers in one sitting." Well, congratulations are not due to me, but to the authors of the eleven papers presented at the conference.

We are happy to reproduce in this edition all but one of the original articles given at the February 7, 1981 conference. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain Thomas Waldrep's essay on extending the writing center beyond the university community.

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University of Alabama

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A Foreword on the Forward Direction of Writing Centers

(to be read at the Southeastern Writing Center Conference-February 7,1981)

When Gary Olson kindly invited me to send along a brief word of greeting, I leaped at the chance to say hello to all of you--even though I am unable to attend the conference because of other commitments. Unfortunately, those commitments are not of my choosing,but were foisted on me by virtue of being low man on the academic totem pole in my department, a problem I'm sure many of you share. In English departments where literature is honored as true intellectual inquiry, composition is too often relegated to the status of "grubbing in the trenches." And, even among composition people,those of us who work in supplementary writing centers find our work relegated to the bottom of <u>that</u> heap since we don't even help to generate the student credit hours for our departments that writing courses do. And some of us don't even have regular faculty appointments,and we often do our work in some left-over dank basement room in some God-forsaken corner of the campus. At the mercy of budget-slashing deans,grants that dry up,or department heads who don't quite know what we do,most of us live a very precarious existence. Yet we survive. And I'd like to take a few moments here to examine some reasons for why we not only survive,but flourish because this ought to give us some sense of where our future lies--and it's a very bright future indeed.

With all of our problems, writing center people seem to have a positive gift not just for "making do,"but for turning disadvantages into benefits. In labs where there are no other professional staff members available, people have turned to undergraduate peer tutors and have,thereby, tapped an almost unexplored gold mine of talent and have also helped to extend the concept of collaborative learning into the teaching of writing. Besides, of course, having trained some excellent tutors,provided them with an opportunity to learn the joy of helping

others while improving their own writing,and given them a chance to earn some money too. I can't think of any other means on college campuses for utilizing undergraduate talent so effectively.

Peer tutoring,then,is one advantage born of a disadvantage--lack of staff. Materials development is another. Many of us run a lab on a budget so miniscule that our definition of splurging is buying a second copy of the MLA style sheet. Thus,with little or no funds available for teaching materials, we write our own. Exercises,handouts,units, modules. We write what our students need,and in the process we ignore those canned presentations in textbooks which never satisfy anyone anyway. In short,we wind up gearing our labs to our students,certainly a worthwhile endeavor,and we become the resource place for materials for the whole composition staff. In the process,many of us have become enraptured with and even somewhat skilled at writing materials. For example,in our lab at Purdue, having written hundreds and hundreds of handouts and exercises,we are now writing self-instruction modules for engineering students, are planning to get some of our mini-courses on videotape,and have sold some of our early attempts at self-instruction to a publisher. A number of other labs are engaged in similar work,and some of the best textbooks recently published are the end product of materials designed for and first used in writing centers. The COMP-LAB text,by Mary Epes and her colleagues in the writing lab at York College (CUNY),comes to mind as one example,and I suspect that in the future, labs are going to be an even richer and more visible source of good teaching materials, materials that go beyond the standard run-of-the-mill textbooks.

Yet another problem of labs that we've turned to our advantage is that many of us don't exactly know how and where we fit into our composition programs or exactly what population our center should be serving. (After all, some of us may have been fortunate enough to take a course in the teaching of writing,but I am almost certain that none of us ever took a course in structuring a writing center!) Unsure of our boundaries,we reach out and find new services,new audiences or groups of students whom we can help. In our lab at Purdue, we discovered that along with the freshmen,we can also help engineering students, business writing students, students preparing for LSAT/GMAT exams, foreign

students, clerical staff, grad students,and students writing job applications and resumes. In the process,we've not only expanded our roles,but helped to expand the teaching of writing to a broader range of students. Certainly we've helped make the academic communities on each of our campuses more aware of the need to attend to writing skills in a variety of academic writing situations. As such,we've helped to introduce and reinforce the "writing across the curriculum" movement. In fact,I suspect that one of the most exciting challenges for the future will be the task of finding our role in writing programs which move out across the curriculum. When writing is part of many classrooms beyond the English department, students will need a writing center, a place where they can meet with tutors as they write. As the flexible arm of writing programs, writing centers will be that place.

One last comment on present difficulties that bode well as being future advantages. It is our very precariousness that tends to keep us honest. We know we have to be good,and we hold ourselves accountable for what we do. When students fail courses or competency exams,that's their problem. When students don't improve because of their writing lab work, that's our problem. Thus,like the car rental people,we try harder. Looked upon as a departmental luxury, we retaliate by keeping records,evaluating our services,and measuring the success of our instruction. In doing so, we keep assessing and reassessing what we do. It's hard to get stagnant in such an atmosphere. Very few labs that I know of have the luxury--or the dreariness of doing the same old thing year after year. Less useful services get discarded,and new challenges appear. Writing centers have begun to offer conferences on writing, they reach out to tutor people in the community,they offer practicums for education majors, they do research, they teach minicourses in classrooms in other disciplines,they help with public speaking and interview skills,and--in short--they go where the need is. As long as we keep assessing, keep staying in tune with the needs of our own campuses, we'll continue to thrive.

As we do, perhaps there are areas we haven't yet explored sufficiently as part of our role. One area for future development that we have not adequately tapped is research. We'll need research to help us learn how to diagnose--really diagnose writing difficulties,and we'll

need research to help us evaluate all the kinds of instruction we offer. Because we are so much closer to the student in the lab than in the classroom, we have a rich supply of raw data and a marvelous means for instant feedback, two necessities for serious researchers. For example, as data to work with, we see grading systems that fail to inform, classroom exercises that don't teach, and attitudes that don't foster growth in writing development. Moreover, in a field which has shifted to the teaching of the composing process, where better to study the composing process than in a lab where we work with students as they compose? But that's part of what lies ahead,for we are truly a growth industry.

If you need any more proof than the size of the audience here today, let me offer just a few other signs of health. Several books on writing labs will appear this year,and we have a newsletter and a journal as well as regional conferences and the Special Interest Session on labs at the 4C's in Dallas next month.And, whatever else our business is, it's also profitable,for several publishers I know of are actively seeking materials for use in labs,and one publisher is interested in setting up a referral service for writing center consultants. But as we move forward and as we expand and grow, I hope very much that the spirit of sharing and of keeping in touch with one another remains. If that sounds like an overt plug for the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER,that's exactly what I meant it to be because the newsletter should be precisely that--a means of keeping in touch. We need that kind of interchange. Since I couldn't be here today, I'll have to stay in contact with you by the old fashioned means of writing--for now. I wish your conference great success,and I hope that I have the opportunity to meet all of you in person at another time.

Us 'N Howie : The Shape of Our Ignorance

When I was growing up in a small, upstate New York town called Herkimer, sports was the big deal. In summer it was baseball, in fall it was football, and in winter -- well, in winter it was basketball. Basketball in low ceilinged gyms, on shovelled off courts we cleared with rock salt, basketball in scraped off driveways in front of windowless garages.

We all went to Catholic school -- St. Francis de Sales -- from first to eighthgrade, and so for us the biggest basketball year in life was the winter of ninth grade : that was when we had a chance to make the big time, make the freshman team at Herkimer High School.

Now at St. Francis we had a kid named Howie Gulver. Howie was our basketball star, our sure fire player. He wasn't much to look at -- maybe 5'5", 155 pounds -- built rather like a fire hydrant. He wore very thick glasses, tied to his head by old sneaker laces, and he had this floppy hair that spent a great deal of time in his face. That hair was part of Howie's uniform, part of his schtick, his routine: battered old high cut sneakers in whatever odd color was on sale -- black or orange or purple; an oversize sweatshirt with the sleeves cut off, the unlikely face of Mozart on the front when he forgot to turn it inside out; long underwear, ratty cut off shorts, and a left hand glove with the fingers cut off. Howie also had two moves that were part of that schtick, two ways of getting the ball to the basket that set him head and shoulders

above us all: a five foot left-hand hook shot that slammed off the dead old wood backboards we played against; and a high dribble, stutter step move that none of us could stop. He'd bounce the ball about head high, flip the hair off his face, take three or four quick steps and make the layup -- all before he bounced the ball again. We were always amazed.

Howie's sole ambition in his ten years of elementary school -- he saw a couple of grades twice -- was to make that freshman team. He worked harder than any of us -- played in every pickup game, hit his hook shot, and practiced his high dribble move till long after we'd all gone home for supper. By the end of eighth grade, we knew when he set up in his spot five feet from the basket, he would score.

Well, the big day came. December 4, 1965 -- and we all shuffled on up to the gym at Emma B. Foley Junior High, the Catholic school kids still in one group, the public school kids in another. Nobody changed in the locker room -- we'd been there before, and knew enough to wear our gym clothes under our coats. It would be bad enough to have to take a lukewarm shower in the world's ugliest, draftiest, pea green locker room.

Howie was wearing his usual outfit -- even the glove -- and he was ready, looked cool. Before the tryout proper began, we stood around, shooting the way kids do -- trying to impress the opposition, to psyche them out. And Howie was

wowing them -- dropping that hook shot home, making his high dribble move -- nonchalantly, of course -- past imaginary defenders, flipping his hair back off his face -- well, disdain fully. He was ready. We all -- the Catholic school kids -- were sort of basking in Howie's glow. "We're with him," we tried to telepath. "One of us is gonna make it <u>for sure</u>."

Along about then Coach Tekler made his appearance. Tekler was a youngish, crew cut man, a social studies teacher whose bizarre classroom humor and horsey, inhaling laugh gave way to a humorless, no-nonsense dictator on the basketball court. You never quite knew where you stood with him, because his eyes never quite focused -- but we all know about his system for cutting players: If you made it, he'd send you to sit in the first row of bleachers; if he needed another look, he'd tell you to stand down in the corner under the scoreboard; if you were cut, he'd say "Hit the showers, boys." The team was formally announced a week later, but the signals were clear.

Tryouts began. We formed two lines for layups, began the drill. Everyone was nervous, so maybe <u>we</u> didn't notice Howie's misses -- he hadn't practiced layups, for heaven's sake -- but probably Tekler noticed. Next, we were broken up into teams. I was on Howie's, and delighted -- I figured I'd ride onto the team on his coattails. First time down

the floor he gave me a look that I knew meant "GET ME THE BALL," and I nodded. Howie took up his spot, his kingdom five feet from the basket, and stood waiting. I had a little trouble getting free to pass -- my defender was an over-zealous public schooler -- but I finally got the ball to Howie, who reflexively began his move with a flip of his hair, and then -- brrth -- a whistle! Everybody stopped. Tekler held three fingers in the air and said "Three Second Violation -- and Red Team's ball." Howie looked puzzled -- what was "Three Second Violation"? We never played that! Must've been somebody else's mistake.

The other team scored rather easily, and we came back down the floor. Howie was taking no chances - this time: he walked the ball down, and clearly didn't plan to pass. He dribbled carefully as far as the foul line and then, again the head flipped, and he made his high dribble move -- high bounce, three or four quick steps and -- tweet -- another whistle. This time Tekler made a turning motion with his hands: "Traveling Violation: Red Team's Ball."

That finished it for Howie. Two times he'd touched the ball, two times we'd lost it. The other players on our team, anxious to save their skins, froze him out -- but I think Howie was too shocked to shoot anyway.

And then our brief tryout game was over, and there was Tekler saying to me and Howie "Hit the showers, boys," and

it was finished. All our waiting, all the practice -- all Howie's practice! How could this happen?

Howie recovered his cool enough to storm into the locker room -- kicking lockers shut, throwing towels, abusing other cuttees. And maybe Tekler sensed that some explanation was needed -- certainly he'd have had to be deaf to miss Howie's little display. Anyway, he came in and firmly, if not angrily, sat Howie in a corner: "Look, son," he said, "I'm sorry. I saw your hook shot in warmups, and it's nice -- but you're too small to play center, and you can't stand in that lane all day. And your other move is terrific for the playground, but it won't work here. It's a walk, a travel. Son: you don't know your fundamentalsout there. You don't know what you're doing."

It's a pretty somber tale, isn't it. Poor Howie -- all those dreams, all those hours of hard work, all that shattered confidence. And you're wondering why I tell it here, or probably you've guessed. I see us in Howie -- us writing center directors, the whole writing center movement: adolescent, hopeful, hard working at what we know how to do, a little cocky, hung up on our own schtick; and as Howie was to our Catholic school gang the object of group hope, so we are mis-

cast as the hope of our profession.

I'm here to play Coach Tekler to our professional Howie-ism; I'm here to tell you that the PROBLEM, in capital letters, is that we don't know the fundamentals. That when it comes to teaching writing in individualized ways, one to one, we don't know what we are doing.

There. I said what I knew I had to say since I was invited to write this paper: the greatest obstacle to the effective operations of writing centers is our ignorance. And if I was just like Coach Tekler, I'd send you home to figure out what I meant; and you'd probably argue against my indictment, decide I was a crackpot, and forget it.

But I'm going to help you out. I'm going to take a few pages and outline our ignorance for you -- rub it in so you know how little we know. I'll begin by defining our task for you: our job, our reason for being, is to teach composing. We take people who come to us with a composing process that cranks out unsuccessful pieces of writing, and we try to change that process -- fix it, alter it -- to produce more successful writing.

In more specific terms, this means being able to do four things.

(1) Identify, with and for our writers, the composing process they use now.

(2) Help them work back from their flawed products to the process in order to guess at what might be going wrong.

(3) Help our writers set goals for changes in that process, and devise ways to make those changes happen -- coaching writers as they learn, practice, and employ such changes.

(4) We have to help our writers gauge the success of the changes made -- help them measure their own growth in composing.

And those four, folks, are the major headings in the outline of our ignorance. I want to take them now, one at a time, to say somwthing about where we stand, and where we need to go.

(1) About number one I'll say least. Let me drop some names: Janet Emig; Sandra Perl; Nancy Sommers; Richard Beach; Linda Flower and John Hayes. Here are a few questions: (a) Do you know these people and their work? Do you see the picture of man composing they're giving us? If not, you'd better learn. (b) Why aren't there any writing center people on my list -- me included? Why aren't <u>we</u> describing composing, using our centers as research centers? There is much we need to know. (c) What do we know about how much writers need to know about how they write? How much does it help them to have amodel of their strategies, some internalized list of reminders? Don't you think we ought to find out?

(2) Number two we have neglected -- badly. One book -- Mina Shaughnessy's <u>Errors and Expectations</u> -- sets the tone for the work we must do. She established for us the logic and integrity of every writer's work, no matter how flawed.

But her book does not go far enough. Let me give you one example. Consider all those writers labelled "poor organization" that we've lumped together for years. Are they a homogeneous group? Of course not. Their composing goes wrong in all sorts of strange ways : some fail to/don't know how to revise; some can't read; some have no method for prewriting, and wear out under the strain of producing any text at all; some have too many ideas, and collapse under the weight of their own fertility, too unaware of audience and purpose to sort and organize what they have to say.

Now in a classroom, maybe it's forgivable -- if not right -- for a teacher to say "Organize better" or "Please submit outlines with essays" as a way of handling the problem. But in a writing center, such blanket assertions are unforgivable. We have to know where to look for what is going wrong, we need to begin to examine these textual breakdowns as Shaughnessy examined the snarled syntax and lexicon of her students.. And we must record our tracings, share them, publish them.

(3) Number three is, unfortunately, where we think we are best. It represents our left-handed hook shot from five feet out, our high dribble, stutter step move. Almost every writing center I've ever seen had files and files of stuff for all occasions : subject-verb argreement practice, notes on note-taking, instructions on essay exam writing, tomes on the apostrophe, the dash, the semi-colon. And such files are dis-

tressing because they symbolize our lack of confidence in our greatest tools -- our tutors and our students' writing. Show me the materials that can serve as an audience. Show me materials that are compassionate, eager readers, fellow writers. Show me materials that can intervene in composing, be there when the rough spots come. More than anything, show me materials that can motivate!

Now I am not, in spite of my apparent militancy, against all materials. When they can help, when they can reinforce, they are wonderful. But I do oppose the tyranny of materials: of workbooks and tapes and handouts and exercises. All such devices present a terrific obstacle to our growth, our maturation. Like Howie and his hook shot, we fall back on them whenever the pressure is on, whenever we're at a loss -- we will not improvise, will not risk. So do me a favor: when you get back, put them in a box, bury it in the cellar for six months. Make yourselves see your writers anew: devise, experiment with new approaches, new perspectives. Then, when you're sure you've got a more flexible repertoire, when you've licked your dependence, bring them back out and use them -- sometimes.

(4) Heading Number four is the one that makes me shudder. It's the one category where ignorance hits closest to home, where ignorance will cost us our jobs. Here's the picture as it stands now: We are supposed to improve our students' writing, most of us the very expensive, non-credit generating, tutorial

way. We measure our success in ways dictated to us from outside; number of students seen, number of visits, number of repeat visits. Sometimes the statistics are of another kind: number of clients who stay in school; number who pass departmental or state-wide exam; number who report improved grades in our courses.

But are any of these a measure of what we're doing? Which of those figures, or what combination of them, would constitute evidence of our success in teaching composing? NONE of them. We don't know how to measure growth in composing -- save to measure changes in product -- so we abdicate the responsibility to the people who know least -- administrators and budget makers.

Well, let me tell you something. Someday someone is going to notice how expensive we are, and they're going to ask how we're doing, and how we measure our success. And at the rate things are going, we're going to stare at them, open-mouthed, while they give our students some standardized test or an in-house essay or a grammar exam -- on the pretext, of course, that we've been tutoring our students for this. And lo and behold, they'll find that six or eight weeks of writing center work produces NO miracles on such tests. No ones on holistic tests become sixes, no "D" students "A" students. We will know there was improvement -- in editing, or in pre-writing, in conception of audience, in revision -- but

the testing won't show it. So, we might protest, they're measuring centimeter growth with a yardstick. But that will be too late. We must develop our systems for reviewing what we teach; we must dictate them, the tasks to measure them; and we must do it now.

When I was invited to write this paper, I was warned -- prudently, I thought -- to be practical. And some of you are sitting there now thinking I've violated that warning, that I've offered you pie-in-the-sky theories, and ignored the needs and problems of my audience. But you're wrong. I know the practical problems. I face them too: time, space, money, image, publicity, personnel. I have to make up reports, arrange schedules; deal with recalcitrant students -- and teachers; talk to Deans and Chairs. But I'm telling you that none of these problems is more PRACTICAL than dissovling this ignorance I've outlined. Teaching writing in writing centers is expensive, hard work. If we are to survive, we must do it very, very well -- better than anyone else. For that to happen, we must know everything we can about what we do and how we do it; we have to be able to measure our success, and on our terms.

Let me put it this way. Last time I was home, I dropped in at the local Y -- a converted Armory -- to shoot baskets. And you can guess who was there: Howie. Fat, rumpled, older slowerHowie. I'd like to say that Tekler's talk woke him up; that he worked on his game, went on to star in high school and

college, studied and became a doctor. But he didn't. He is an unhappy, unemployed trash collector who drinks too much beer and hates to go home to his wife and kids. So he hides in the gym and shoots baskets -- left-hand hook shots, from five feet, high dribble, four step drives. He never believed Tekler, never changed his game -- and he's washed up, finished. We can't let that happen to us.

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After They Pass the Grammar Tests, Then What?

Thomas Edison experimented with hundreds of filaments before he finally produced a workable electric light bulb. In many ways, when I try a new technique in the Writing Center, I feel like I'm back in his New Jersey lab under the glow of a kerosene lamp, holding up a fragile piece of wire and saying, "Hey, Tom -- what about this one?" Even though Edison eventually succeeded, his product was dim and inefficient. Thankfully, we haven't had to live with that light bulb because of the continuous experimentation with electric lighting. Writing Centers, on the other hand, have by and large stuck with their initial successes.

Only recently, with conferences such as this and the work of such researchers as Mina Shaugnessey, Andrea Lunsford, Lynn Troyka, and Janet Emig, have we begun to come out of the dark. Yet to enlighten our students' progress, we must go beyond quick-fix solutions to treat the full range of language activities that constitute good writing.

Writing Centers were conceived as education's last ditch attempt to boost literacy to acceptable college levels. Faced with the flood of open-admissions students, organizers responded to the demands of the moment, often disregarding the wisdom of the ages. Thus, despite their all-inclusive title, Writing Centers became responsible primarily for grammar -- the least consequential part of writing. Since the early 1900's, the NCTE has chastised English education for its myopic view of writing.[1] During the 1960's, abundant research successfully documented the weak

correlation between grammar instruction and writing improvement.[2] Nevertheless, in the early 1970's, as Writing Centers popped up on campuses across the country, their founders apparently succumbed to what Stephen and Susan Judy call "a misplaced nostalgia for teaching methods that never worked in the first place."[3] The basic model for the first generation of Writing Centers was the self-paced, tutor-assisted, competency-based review of grammar validated by a battery of mastery exams and often neatly bookended with comprehensive pre- and post-tests.

Now that I've criticized this model, let me defend it. Clearly, this was a package that sold. The improvement shown in post-tests on apostrophes or sentence fragments made a convincing case for the need and success of the Writing Center. The public demand for basic skills was satisfied, and funding officials' skepticism over new programs was quelled. Consequently, the first generation successfully transformed the idea of a writing center into a reality. However, as its legacy, the first generation bequeathed the many problems of going beyond the original bounds of the Writing Center to arrive at an integrated approach to the language needs of basic writers. The first problem is political -- how to overcome the typecasting implicit in such titles as "remedial English" or Writing Skills Center. The second is curricular -- how to expand the Center's services to basic writers and experiment with new approaches without duplicating what is already offered in more established writing courses.

The typecasting of the Center makes experimentation risky. In addition to building a concrete case for the Center's effectiveness, the first generation gave it a genuine identity. A student having difficulties with grammar and mechanics came to the Writing Center; everyone else enrolled in freshman comp. Without the competency test model, the Center faces some tough political problems. Lacking the distinguishing feature of the tests, the Writing Center

may not look so unique. In our Center, neither are the students. ESL sutdents enter one program. Students with ACT scores below 12 come to the Writing Center. However, new teachers are typically surprised (and relieved) to find little difference between the writing skills of many "basic" writers and their peers in 101. Their surprise is justified. Thirty-six percent of those who enroll in English 100 do so voluntarily and have scores adequate for admission to 101. Overall, some students may be mildly deficient in specific areas of grammar, but most are identifiable as basic writers only by their flat, unimaginative, underdeveloped prose and the difficulties they have in producing it. No more than 15% of our students regularly produce the blurred and garbled syntax characteristic of the basic writers Mina Shaugnessey described.

Thus, when students of the basic and regular writing programs are not easily distinguished, legitimate questions can be raised about the need for two parallel programs. When their curricula are also similar, the questions become more troublesome. Yet the majority of texts for basic writers that I have seen are simply watered-down versions of the rhetorics for 101 or are pepped-up versions of the basic skills model. With materials such as these, curricula can't help but mirror freshman English.

Merging the two programs is not the answer, except for the most reactionary. The thrust of recent research in basic writing has been to claim the domain of the entire writing process, yet to insist that basic writers demonstrate not just more severe but different writing problems. These differences are clearly not restricted to deficiencies in "skills," but seem to have more to do with the complete range of language activities from writing to reading to thinking. Perhaps the most important contribution of Errors and Expectations is Shaughnessey' comprehensive analysis of the problems of basic writers and her insistence that reductive, atomistic curricula will not suffice.

Nor should we refuse to enroll more capable students. These students use the basic writing program to build self-confidence or obtain more detailed instruction than they might receive (or in some cases already have received) in English 101, and they can be amply challenged by the Center's smaller classes and individualized teaching. By their self-definition as basic writers, they are telling us that there is more to the field than our current diagnostic measures indicate.

Instead, the solution to the Center's political and curricular problems lies in the teachers' taking advantage of the same features that attract many students -- smaller classes, individualized teaching, and a reputation for effectiveness -- to become innovators in diagnosing and correcting language problems. Unlike the larger and more cumbersome freshman English programs, Writing Centers have, inherently, the flexibility to experiment, if only they resist the typecasting they've inherited. The difference between the first generation and the second is that the first began with a restrictive set of assumptions about basic writers which generated a limited and unsatisfactory view of the problems. Mastery tests, for example, show improvement in grammar on the tests while the writing problems remain much the same. The second generation, if it can maintain Edison's spirit of experimentation, can adopt a more comprehensive attitude toward basic writing as a heuristic for a more complete understanding of the students' linguistic and psychological problems in using language. Given the complexity of the subject, along with the significant differences among populations in Centers nationwide, Writing Centers can perhaps never hope to achieve The Method, yet they can broaden and justify the choices.

The Writing Center at the University of Utah is in the process of implementing a comprehensive language arts curriculum. Having outgrown both

a competency-based and a rhetoric-based curriculum, we are developing a program to integrate skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking. At the core of the two-quarter program is sentence-combining, supplemented with independant writing assignments and a reading program. Although the effectiveness of sentence-combining for freshman writers has been thoroughly documented, the research focuses on writers who are already reasonably fluent users of the language, as indicated by an initial number of words/T unit of 15 in the Miami experiment.[4] Our basic writers, on the other hand, began with an average of 12.8 words/T unit, a figure that places them at around the 9th or 10th grade level. Despite these differences, little attention has been given to the effectiveness of sentence-combining for basic writers. However, we are finding that the reasons for success and the nature of improvement are very different from what happens among writers in the regular freshman class. With basic writers, sentence-combining seems to accelerate and refine language skills beyond the writing process. More importantly, as a relatively new approach to teaching basic writers, sentence-combining has opened up some new insights into their problems. While the curriculum is still not The Method, it seems to contribute qualitatively and quantitatively to the students' writing.

Let me enumerate some of our findings:

1. Syntactic Maturity: Although syntax matures under a traditional rhetorical curriculum, the advances are greater with a sentence-combining program that teaches specific syntactic patterns. Using the Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg text, The Writer's Options, we study five syntactic patterns: relative clauses, appositives, participles, subordination, and co-ordination. Students' final papers show an increased frequency of the patterns over their initial diagnostic papers. Increases range from a low of 132% to a high of

590% for appositives (see Table 1). Except for subordination, these frequencies are two to four times higher than under the old curriculum.

2. Improvements in Content: Like other researchers, we are also finding that syntactic maturity coincides with improvements in content. Here, making comparisons is somewhat more difficult because of differences between the old curriculum and the new. Formerly, students imitated structured models to produce highly derivative single paragraph themes. These were revised until they passed -- sometimes with the teacher inevitably contributing as much as the student. Currently, assignments are less structured, with the main emphases on collecting information, arriving at an original insight, and organizing ideas , at most, three chances for revision.

Interestingly, while students are still assigned to write only a 250 word paragraph, their papers are 42% longer than the papers in the old curriculum, and they are typically divided into an average of three paragraphs. The paragraphing is logical and effective, though little specific instruction about paragraphing is given. By imitating the form rather than the content of the multi-paragraph, whole discourse exercises that constitute the meat of the text, students seem to be developing needed skills in inference-making, and applying these skills to their writing. These findings support Andrea Lunsford's conclusion that "as students' ability to manipulate syntactic structures improved, so did their ability to draw inferences and make logical connections."[5]

3. Holistic Evalutions: Holistic ratings of the two groups reveal some ongoing difficulties -- 4.0 for the old curriculum, 3.4 for the new on a five point scale. The lattitude allowed in the present assignments, their cognitive rather than rhetorical goals, the teacher's reduced intervention in revising, and the longer lengths probably account for the

differences. While we believe that the sentence-combining students are writing richer, more creative papers, they are not able to organize their ideas as coherently as we would like. Thus, we are currently devising a sequence of writing assignments that will emphasize progressively more complex cognitive skills, leaving more specific instruction in rhetoric for freshman comp.

4. Improvements in Attitude: Basic writers' self consciousness and their paralyzing concern with error is well known. Sentence-combining, with its emphasis on syntactic options, activates students' native fluency with the language and helps to release students from their inhibitions over correctness. They experience more realistically the process of writing and understand revision as more than the elimination of error. Classes come closer to the ideal "community of writers" as students learn to give substantive advice to one another and to make cogent criticisms about their own work. This atmosphere promotes independence and self-reliance in writing -- attitudes that seem foreign to beginning writers.

Other positive features of the curriculum include increased production of writing and attention to grammar and mechanics within specific contexts. Here, too, sentence-combining lends itself to problems that seem uniquely those of basic writers. Compared to most 101 students, basic writers have done little or no writing in high school, so they're essentially starting from scratch in the Writing Center. By teaching grammar skills in the context of sentences rather than rules, we can overcome the key drawback of the competency-test approach -- the lack of transference from the test to the writing. Moreover, by working with real sentences, students seem better able to infer and apply the grammatical conventions they use every day without having to make the confusing side trip into prescriptive grammar.

Still to be researched are problems in vocabulary development and, as other researchers have suggested, improvements in reading comprehension.[6] The limitations of the curriculum, however, keep alive many persistent puzzles: Why do annoyances such as the comma splice and the sentence fragment re-appear, just when they seem to have been corrected? Despite the increased frequency of syntactic patterns, why are they not as sophisticated in the students' independent writings as they are in the whole discourse exercises? Finally, why do the papers continue to display a conceptual flatness in both topic and development that runs contrary to the students' personal vitality and oral expressiveness?

Taken together, our successes and failures suggest that the long life light bulb of teaching basic writing is still a ways off. What seems clear to me is that increasingly comprehensive visions of how these students use and understand language is the direction to follow. To reach this goal, the Writing Center needs to take on a new identity as a Language Center. To arrive at this point, there's no reason why we must follow the lead of the group of Californians who tried to install a new light bulb -- it took one person to screw it in and 99 to share the experience! Let's hope, instead, that each of us can put in his own bulb.

Table 1: Improvement in Writing Abilities

	Diagnostic Essays N=30	Old Curriculum N=49	% Increase over Diagnostics	Sentence Combining Curriculum N=50	% Increase over Diagnostics
T-units/sentence	1.18	1.27		1.21	
Words/T-unit Mean	12.8	15.4		16.6	
Relative Clauses					
Total in sample	47	96		205	
Mean/paper	1.6	2.0	25%	4.1	156%
Appositives					
Total in sample	6	20		69	
Mean/paper	.20	.41	105%	1.38	590%
Participles					
Total in sample	32	118		204	
Mean/paper	1.06	2.41	127%	4.08	285%
Subordinates					
Total in sample	70	252		270	
Mean/paper	2.33	5.14	121%	5.40	132%
Holistic Means		4.0		3.4	
Paper Length		290 words		413 words	
Paragraphs/paper		1.00		2.87	

Table 2: Comparison of Developmental Levels

	Grade Level 8	Diagnostics	12	College Freshmen Pre	Post
Words/T-unit	11.34 (Hunt)	12.8	14.40 (Hunt)	15.00 15.31	14.95 (Miami control) 16.05 (Miami exp.) 15.4 (Utah control) 16.6 (Utah exp.)

NOTES

[1]J. N. Hook, A Long Way Together (Urbaba, Illinois, NCTE: 1979).

[2]See, for example, Stephen Sherwin, Four Problems in Teaching English: A Critique of Research (Urbaba, Illinois: NCTE, 1969); Richard Braddock, et al., Research in Written Composition (Urbaba, Illinois: NCTE, 1963).

[3]Stephen and Susan Judy, English Teachers' Handbook (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1979), p. 191.

[4]Max Morenberg, et al., "Sentence Combining at the College Level: An Experimental Study,"Research in the Teaching of English 12 (1978), pp. 245-256.

[5]Andrea Lunsford, "What We Know -- and Don't Know -- About Remedial Writers," College Composition and Communication (1978), p. 51.

[6]Sandra Stotsky, "Sentence Combining as a Curricular Activity: Its Effect on Written Language Development and Reading Comprehension," Research in the Teaching of English 9 (1975), pp. 30-71.

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Records, Statistics, and Reports: The Writing Center Justifies Itself

I would like to speak informally this morning about a subject that I suspect most of us find mundane, if not down right boring, but which we have probably come to acknowledge as vital to the efficient operation of a writing center--the record keeping process.

I assume most of you are faculty or graduate students whose first love is literature and language and who have, as I have, entered the Writing Center through the back door. Most of us, I can guess, are not experts in administrative efficiency. We may never have taken a business administration course; we may never have had the practical experience of managing an office in the private sector. Yet here we are thrust into the position not just of teaching students how to express themselves correctly and convincingly, but also of running a rather complex office, frequently without full time secretarial help. Our dilemma is like that of the doctor who, though skilled in diagnosing and treating the ills of his patients, has to go back to school at night to take a course in office management. Instead of reading books in anatomy and toxicology and the latest issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, he can be found pouring over Terry and Stallard's text Office Management and Control or Zane Quible's Introduction to Administrative Office Management.

Part of the reason for his, or our, concern for such matters is self-defense. At least, it should be. My own rude introduction to the hazards of administrative ignorance came when my college adopted a policy requiring

that students transferring credit to the college for freshman English pass a writing proficiency examination. The reason was simple. Our own freshman writing course was sufficiently rigorous that poorly prepared students avoided it by taking English at other schools and transferring back the credit. They would fail or drop our course, yet return, smugly, I always thought, at the end of the summer, certified competent in writing. When we finally intiated our proficiency test--an argumentative writing sample--we found that some 40% of these students could not write the equivalent of a D essay by our standards.

The examination turned out to be successful in several ways: we encouraged students to stick with our own courses, and we were able to identify those weak students who transferred freshman composition credit and provide them the individualized tutorial assistance which they obviously needed in order to improve their writing skills. Most of those students who failed the test were, with Writing Center help and some diligent practice, eventually able to up-grade their skills and pass the test.

I go into this digression to make a point about forms. Let me show you the form which, I am embarrassed to say, I devised for keeping proficiency examination records. (Fig. 1) Actually, I was "encouraged" by the Director of Records and Registration at my college to set the form up as you see it. I did not know enough to object or to see what would happen as a result of this information system. Here was a form that would contain--in quadruplicate--a great deal of information about each of the three times a student might take the examination. The form, incidentally, was funded through my own budget.

In some ways the form was well-designed. The problem was in the number of entries that had to be made and who would have to make them. We--a

Writing Center without a full time secretary and with only student assistant help--were to receive a computer list of students eligible to take the test. Perhaps 400 names would be included on the list, and for each name we were to fill out a separate form. We were then to send a notice to each of the students, at our expense, informing them of the test dates and procedures. Then we were to have the student sign the form at each administration of the test and to fill in the form after each scoring. When the student either passed the test or failed it for the third time, we were to fill in the bottom portion, enter a code in the box in the upper right hand corner, extract the third copy for the Writing Center records, and forward the other three to the Office of Records and Registration. We ended up filling out forms even for the 200 to 250 students each semester who, though their names appeared on the computer list, never bothered to come to take the test. For the 50 to 100 students each semester who were inadvertently left off the computer list because of errors in the records or admissions office but who showed up to take the test at one of the test dates, we had to delay beginning the test while we filled in new forms from scratch. The entire procedure was extraordinarily time consuming, produced useless paper flow, imposed upon both students and writing center staff, contributed nothing to the real purpose of the center, and shifted the record keeping responsibility for what was obviously a college, not writing center, policy away from the records office and to the center.

Three years later, after a hard summer of administrative haggling, we finally changed this system. The problem with forms and procedures, indeed, is that once they are in place they become chiseled in granite. Here is the new form we devised. (Fig. 2) Notice how short and simple it is.

It is generated by the computer, stuffed in a window envelope, mailed at the central administration's expense. The student brings the same form with him as a ticket to gain entry to the examination. We collect the forms at the door and, after the tests are scored, record the results on the same forms and return them to Records and Registration to be entered on the student's record. We keep no copies in the Writing Center because it is not our business to keep official college records. We do keep the examination--marked with score, date, and social security number--so that we can go over the essay with the student.

Thus one piece of paper, computer generated, serves as notice of examination, admission ticket to the exam, and means of recording results of the test. We mark the form just once--when we record the student's score. What I am still asking myself is why I didn't think of this system three years ago. The answer is simple: I just hadn't thought about record keeping before and had no experience in it. I might add that there is an added benefit to the new system. Since we no longer keep a copy of the official record in our office, we are not bothered by numerous requests from advisers and others that we check the student's proficiency examination record.

Our revision of the Proficiency form resulted from some simple steps which any management text would recommend:

1) Make flow charts of where the records go.

2) Make a list of purposes for information storage.

3) Aim to reduce the number of time a form is handled.

4) Try to reduce to a minimum the number of forms or copies of forms.

These are the sorts of steps our doctor, studying his office management texts, may run across. Probably he'll be struck, as I was, with the obviousness of the principles of form design and information flow. Yet the obvious is hard to see from behind a desk piled high with needless paperwork.

One way to see the forest for the trees is to consult a text such as Terry and Stallard. You might, for example, ask yourself these questions selected from a number which the authors suggest: (Fig. 3)

1. Are the stated objectives and requirements satisfied completely by the system?
2. Is every part of the information really necessary?
3. Does the system perform more efficiently, more accurately, and more quickly than the previous system?
4. If organizational changes are required, are these acceptable, and if some are not, will modification seriously restrict the proposed benefits?
5. At what points are staff members' judgments, interpretations, and decision making a part of the system? Are there adequate control mechanisms over the staff at these points?
6. Is any part of the system being accepted on the basis that "it has always been done this way"?*

I venture to say that many of us have sorted out our own problems with forms and records not by referring to literatrue on the subject but simply by responding to the pressures of our jobs. And we have each responded differently to our different needs and the different ways in which our writing centers operate. Having made an informal survey of some writing center directors in the Southeast and elsewhere, I would also suggest that most of us have moved from overly involved record keeping designed to provide detailed justification for our funding to a more simplified system that retains less data but which is much more easily managed. We've come to realize that there are, after all, only four ways in which you can use information. We can

1. measure it,
2. store it,
3. retrieve it,
4. deliver it.

If we maintain information or records which we never use in these ways, or if we store information without ever needing to retrieve it, or if we measure it when in fact we never make use of the measurements, then we don't really need the information at all.

The director of the Writing Lab at Francis Marion College in South Carolina told me of the vast amount of information he used to maintain in his office. "There's enough information there for three dissertations," he said. But he found that much of that information was never used. He has reduced his record to a simple system in which information is kept on one form printed on a manila folder for each student. The form is keyed to materials in the lab so that it serves as an index or catalog of resources. The instructor comes to the center and checks appropriate boxes on the form to indicate what his students should do, which materials would be appropriate. When the student comes to the lab he looks at the form on his folder and can immediately begin work on the right materials. He checks another box when he has completed the work. The instructor in turn can come to the writing center to see precisely what his students have done. This one form, kept in the lab, replaces several different forms, each of which would have to be handled, filled in, and delivered.

Perhaps a more typical example if the form used by the Writing Center at the University of Southern California. (Fig. 4) On one 8½ by 11 inch sheet is space for an instructor to refer the student for work on specific materials or aspects of the composing process. The instructor retains

a copy for his records. The copy he sends to the Writing Center with the student comprises the record form kept in the Center.

Other colleges use a less formal system in which a student simply comes by the center and signs up for an open time slot. This system is used at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and at Guilford College, just to mention two places. It has the advantage of extreme simplicity without the bother of delivering information between the Writing Center and the instructor. At Guilford, for example, records are kept in a log that summarizes the student's work for each visit. The system works well because the Learning Skills Center at Guilford is small and staffed by just two instructors who can easily keep track of the students who come to the center.

At Winthrop we find that we need a somewhat more extensive form. We use a referral form similar to though one third the size of, the form used at the University of Southern California. Our records are kept in two ways: an appointment book and a record form in the student's folder. The book is kept up by student assistants and serves both as a way to schedule conferences and as a running record of attendance so that statistics for the semester can easily be retrieved. Information kept in the appointment book on a weekly basis is sufficient to generate the statistics which we are expected to include in the annual report each spring. (Figs. 5, 6, and 7)

Perhaps these samples and reminders will suggest ways in which we can get a better grasp of the forms and records in our centers. Certainly each center has its own needs and, as with its instructional materials, will need to develop its own systems and forms. What we all ought to be willing to do is to reexamine are systems to make sure that they are as

efficient as possible--that they ask for no more information, no more handling, no more delivery than is in fact required to meet the center's purposes and goals. It may be that the best advice for our record keeping is the same advice that our hard working doctor studying his business adminstration texts might give his overweight patients: keep yourself lean and trim. Don't glut yourself on forms and records and administrative procedures. A writing center, like a person, can be slowed down by excesses -- by too much record keeping and poor form and system design. After all, our purpose is to tutor students. Let's hope a "spare tire" of forms and information doesn't prevent us from bending to their needs.

*Office Management and Control: The Administrative Managing of Information. 8th edition. (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1980.

Overcoming Resistance to the Writing Center

The Individualized Learning Center at Florida Institute of Technology opened in the fall of 1978 as just one aspect of a university-wide effort to increase retention of freshmen. F.I.T. is primarily a scientific and technological university with approximately 3,000 students on its main campus in Melbourne. As we considered the kind of learning center that would be appropriate to F.I.T., we sought to avoid a number of problems frequently associated with writing centers. For one thing, we wanted to insure faculty confidence in and cooperation with the center. A second concern was that we would need to staff the center with reliable, responsible students who could be trusted with expensive audio-visual equipment and who could be in charge of the center during the evening when no faculty members would be present. Third, because of our major concern with freshman retention, we hoped to find a way to meet the needs of as many F.I.T. students as possible. Above all, we wanted to avoid the stigma so frequently attached to the writing center whose sole function is remedial. With these concerns in mind, we decided to make assistance with writing problems just one feature of a multi-purpose center that would attract students on all levels of the university and from every discipline.

As it now exists, the Individualized Learning Center at F.I.T. assists students in three major ways: it offers a variety of programmed self-help materials for most basic and some advanced courses; it provides qualified tutors to help students master all

basic subjects, including mathematics, physics, and chemistry; it serves as a center where instructors may place cassette tapes, slides, and filmstrips on reserve for their students to use as supplementary learning materials. The ILC also serves as a reference center for proper form and organization of papers, resumes, abstracts, and letters.

In order to avoid faculty skepticism toward the kind and quality of remedial instruction offered by a center which is not attached to an academic department, the Individualized Learning Center was placed under the Humanities Department. The center's director and one associate are members of the Humanities faculty. A member of the Mathematics Department serves part time on the center's staff. Having the ILC attached to an academic department and staffed by faculty paid by and teaching in academic departments makes for a spirit of confidence and cooperation throughout the university.

We were able to solve our staffing problem by incorporating the school's tutorial program with the learning center. The program was formerly under the dean of students, and faculty members had no role in the selection process. Now, in addition to having at least a three point GPA, each tutor must be recommended by at least two faculty members. This method of qualifying assures faculty members in all departments of the university that only the most competent students are eligible to work in the ILC. In order to better supervise the program, we decided to have the tutors work with their students in the learning center. Formerly, they could meet whenever and wherever they chose. An additional advantage to this system is that the needs of far more students

are being met. Formerly, a student was assigned to a tutor for an entire quarter. Now, a student comes to the center only when he needs help; he receives as little or as much as he needs; he can also work with more than one tutor on more than one subject. Having the tutors work in the center has also solved our staffing problem. We have lost none of our valuable equipment, and the loss of books has been minimal.

The Individualized Learning Center has a staff of around twenty tutors who work at regularly scheduled times; the same schedule is maintained throughout a quarter. We keep a file of all the subjects for which we have tutors. When a student asks for an appointment, the person at the front desk consults the file, ascertains which tutors can help in that subject, consults the tutors' schedule, and aranges a meeting time. Tutoring in the ILC is free to any F.I.T. students. The learning center is open from 9:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. on weekdays, except Fridays when it closes at 5:00 p.m. At any given hour during the day, there are at least three or four tutors in the center. We try to maintain a balance in terms of subject matter - for example, one tutor for physics, one for chemistry, and one or two for mathematics. Most of the tutors are qualified to assist in two or more major subject areas - for example, mathematics and chemistry or mathematics and physics. Nearly all can provide some degree of help with freshman level mathematics.

The tutors on the ILC staff are, for the most part, juniors and seniors; occasionally we hire an outstanding sophomore; and usually we have one or two graduate students. Some of the tutors qualify for work/study money; the rest are paid from college funds.

Because of its small size, the university is allowed by the federal government to pay students sub-minimum wages. Nevertheless, we always have a waiting list of students who want to be tutors. They enjoy the interaction with the other members of the staff, and they are free to work on their own assignments if no one needs their help during their scheduled hours. Some tutors work as few as three hours a week while others work as many as twenty. In addition to the tutors, we now employ a few other work/study students to sit at the front desk, make appointments, check equipment out and in, and perform various clerical tasks.

Because we have no English majors at F.I.T., very little help with writing is provided by tutors. The two instructors of English from the Humanities Department work directly with students who need such help. We look over the marked papers their instructors have returned, assess their needs, and work with them in whatever manner seems appropriate. For example, if a student's problems are simply grammatical, we may direct him to the mini-courses and other programmed writing materials. If he needs help in the planning and organization of papers, we arrange to work with him throughout the quarter. We have found sentence combining exercises to be especially helpful with both native speakers and international students.

At F.I.T. students most seriously in need of improvement in verbal skills are placed, on the basis of testing, in special classes - Learning Strategies and Fundamentals of Composition - for which they receive college credit. In Learning Strategies, students work to improve their reading rate and comprehension, vocabulary, and study skills. In Fundamentals of Composition,

students perfect their skills in writing sentences and proceed to the paragraph. Students enrolled in these two courses do many of their assignments in the learning center, using the reading and vocabulary materials housed there and supplementary programs in grammar, spelling, paragraph and essay writing and other materials.

An advantage to these weaker students is that by working regularly in the learning center, they become acquainted with the other self-help materials available and quickly take advantage of the tutoring program. Highly competent students also come to the ILC, some to seek help with fairly minor problems and others to spend time on relatively sophisticated mini-courses such as thermodynamics and heat transfer. Thus, the weaker student does not feel the stigma so frequently associated with centers which offer only remediation. Frequently, traditional writing centers fail to achieve their objectives because students are reluctant to be seen there and will come only when instructors require them to do so.

Sometimes a student comes to the Individualized Learning Center at F.I.T. because his advisor or one of his instructors has urged him. However, most students come of their own accord as soon as they sense a need. In the past year, attendance at the center has increased nearly twenty percent. All any student has to do is come to the center and state his need; he will then be given an appointment with a tutor and/or directed to the self-help materials. If a student is in any way confused about the kind of help he needs, he is referred to the director or one of her associates. The ILC, however, has no responsibility for psychological counseling; the Student Counseling Center meets such needs.

Regardless of the reason a student might be drawn initially to the ILC, he quickly becomes aware of the multiplicity of materials available and the variety of ways in which he can broaden his learning. The center has rapidly acquired a reputation as a friendly place where a student can expect to have his needs taken seriously and, in some way, met. In two years, the attrition rate for freshmen, university wide, has dropped from 39% to 33.2%, a drop of almost 6%. The figures are even more impressive within the School of Science and Engineering; two years ago the attrition rate was 40%, but it is now only 31.2%, a drop of almost 9%. The improvement in freshmen retention is, of course, owing to several factors, including improved advising procedures, the use of placement tests, and revised admission standards. In any case, student surveys to date give the learning center the highest approval rating of any service to students on the campus.

Although Florida Institute of Technology is primarily a scientific and technological university, this same kind of learning center format could be adapted in most small colleges and universities to solve the problems common to writing centers and to extend their services.

Writing Centers: Overcoming an Identity Crisis

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Despite the fact that some writing laboratories, such as the one at the University of Iowa, have been in existence for 30 years or more, at most universities the writing center is a relatively new venture. Furthermore, many of these centers have been funded not as a last resort in the battle against the literacy crisis. For example, consider Patrick Hartwell's description of the birth of the writing laboratory at the University of Michigan at Flint. "'Well, the department head said, pushing the chair back from the desk and pausing for a moment, 'nothing else seems to work; we might as well try a writing lab.' And so we did."[1]

For Patrick Hartwell and for hundreds of other writing center directors across the country, the paint was still drying on the door when the first crush of students appeared for tutoring and guidance. As a result, these center directors often faced an identity crisis that could easily be predicted: only a small number of administrators, faculty members, and students had a firm notion of what constituted a writing center. In addition, these vague notions differed from building to building and from campus to campus. As if these complications were not enough, the writing lab directors themselves began their modest programs without any formal organizations or journals in which to share pedagogical concerns. Like a hundred different species of wildflowers, the writing centers burst forth across America, exhibiting a remarkable variety of colors, shapes, and forms.

The pioneers of our industry had little beyond instinct and imagination to guide them when they began the counterattack against plummeting SAT scores and other disturbing signs of the literacy crisis. They sought consistency and growth in the only ways possible: they exchanged letters and

phonecalls; they traded discoveries in coffee shops and bars between sessions at the yearly NCTE Conference and at the annual CCCC gathering. And, like all pioneers, they milled about the frontier waiting for rumors of gold and greener pastures. In the process they followed many dry beds and dusty trails, and they found their share of discouragement. However, the two things that they probably shared were: first, a confident faith that life on the frontier was better than life in the big city of traditional rhetorical approach and second, a nagging notion that there was one true path to teaching writing competence. In recent years many have claimed to have discovered that method.

I first encountered the frontier-discovery syndrome when I attended, as a graduate student, my first CCCC meeting. With pen and notepad I wandered into a session on basic writing and sat in the back. The first two speakers were interesting enough, but I cannot recall today what either had to say. The third speaker, however, I cannot forget. She was a sweet little old lady from Eureka College. As the second speaker ended, she gathered her visual aids and her volumes of notes and pitty-patted up to the lectern in a way that only little old ladies can do without appearing to be parodies of little old ladies. Then, in a voice that startled even the people who were napping in the corners, she yelled, "Eureka! I have found it!"

Unfortunately, everyone soon realized that the little old lady had not found it any more successfully than speakers 1, 2, and 4. But she did start me thinking about the furious search of it--the most effective method of teaching writing skills--that characterizes both the larger study of rhetoric and composition, of which we are a part, and our own group of latter day pioneers. In the composition laboratory discipline, there are a staggering number of methods, theories, and approaches; consequently, there is a constant

scrambling, among our members, toward some firm ground from which to strike a vantage point. Just when the center director feels some security with one approach or method, a new wave comes along, and everyone scrambles onto that particular rock--for example, sentence combining, tagmemics, the chain paragraph, TRIT, composition modules, sentence chunks, the Burke's pentad, Peter Elbow's delicious method of cooking up compositions, the generative rhetoric of the sentence, programed tapes from the Educulture Corporation, and peer-group tutoring, to name a few.[2]

I think it is time to take an honest and critical look at our profession and to admit that we are still pioneers. As the Writing Lab Newsletter has demonstrated, most directors have a different notion of what works and what does not, what theories are workable and which are not. In the meantime, our critics have asked some very tough questions, such as What is a writing laboratory? What do you do in a writing laboratory? Why don't you do what she does in her writing laboratory? Why do we need to do this in the writing laboratory? Can it be done at all? How do you measure what it is that you do in the writing laboratory....once you've done it? And, of course, how much does it cost?

Mina Shaughnessy underscores the depth of our confusion in her well-known article, "Basic Writing," which appears in Gary Tate's anthology of bibliographic essays entitled Teaching Composition. She says, "The teaching of writing to severely unprepared freshman is as yet but the frontier of a profession, lacking even an agreed upon name."[3] To demonstrate her point, as it pertains to the laboratory, I have pulled, from my correspondence file, an abbreviated list of the names by which we identify our services: the

Writing Center, the Writing Laboratory, the Learning Resource Center, the Writing Room, the Developmental Writing Program, the Study Skills Center, the Academic Support Center, the Learning Center, the Composition Corner, the Writing Place, the Writing Haven, the Reading Laboratory, the Reading and Study Skills Lab (RASSL), the Composition Corner, the Comp Closet, and the Bottom Line.

But names, unimportant as they are, have little to do with the practical functioning of these laboratories. That is where the real divergence becomes clear. Some writing centers open their doors only to special admissions students; others only to students in freshman writing classes; still others to members of the non-academic community as well as to the campus at large. In some universities the lab is staffed by full professors; in others by graduate students; in still others by undergraduates. I even found one that depends partly on the services of CETA workers. Places like the lab at Purdue have programs for English as a Second Language that operate alongside study sessions for students preparing the Law School Admission Test. Some offer services for only students who need work in grammar and punctuation; others stress prewriting and invention; still others feature spelling, vocabulary and study skills. Some labs do all these things; others do none. Some have rigorous appointments schedules and gather students into the quiet mausoleums of the library; others are free-wheeling, anarchistic centers of interchange that jam students into converted boilerrooms.

Lab directors involve themselves in a number of ancillary projects as well. For example, Mary Kroft at the University of Wisconsin St. Paul publishes a newsletter for teachers of writing. Ülle Lewes at Ohio Wesleyan writes a newspaper column and spreads writing tips across the campus several days a week. One university offers sign language classes in the laboratory,

and the director at Emporia State advertises, a "hotline," a telephone tutoring service. In a certain sense, it is amazing that, when the call went out announcing this conference, the people in this room recognized that they were the ones being summoned, our labs being as different as they are.

And yet, although many different kinds of wildflowers grow on the prairie, no traveler is going to exclude the most unusual ones from the general category of "wildflower." We do share common concerns and goals. But, as Shaughnessy says, the only evidence of our common goals so far is "a miscellany of articles on what has been working, or appears to the teacher to have been working, in a variety of places, with a variety of teachers and pedagogies. We find among the articles much that has been going on in freshman English for years."[4]

Shaughnessy implications are most telling and most valid. We have been discovering and rediscovering the truths of our narrow discipline independently, as the wheel must have been invented in a hundred different villages over the span of several centuries of prehistory. The greatest evidence of our identity crisis in the laboratory area is that, until the winter of 1981, we laboratory specialists did not even have a journal devoted specifically to the expression of our pedagogical concerns and expectations. Certainly the appearance of The Writing Center Journal is the first important leap toward overcoming our identity crisis.

I think we should be encouraged by the prospects for the future if the history of other disciplines is any model. E. D. Hirsch, writing in an NCTE anthology on basic writing research, says that intellectual and social historians agree that a field of inquiry like basic writing goes through two principal stages of growth. "The first stage, called 'immature,' is where 'a number of schools compete for the domination of a given field.' This period is marked by controversies like our own, in which people 'confronting

the same phenomena describe and interpret them in different ways.' With the gradual advance of knowledge, the conflicts subside, and a consensus builds up which forms the discipline into a genuine intellectual community. Members of this community can then take the foundations of their field for granted and can therefore direct their attention to the problems and subproblems to be solved. The community can also agree among themselves whether a particular piece of work does in fact constitute a genuine solution to a problem. At this more advanced period, progress in the discipline becomes rapid and exciting, and it is then that it first becomes a genuine or mature discipline. Where before progress had been sporadic, uncertain, and disputed, now each new piece of work can be assimilated and integrated with the rest so that the frontiers of the discipline are pushed back in a clearly understood way."[5]

Although Hirsch is talking about composition in a larger sense than do the lab specialists, these observations are every bit as valid for the laboratory subdiscipline. Both Hirsch and Shaughnessy use the word "frontier," and I think it's important for us to adopt that term in our attempt to articulate the obstacles that impede the progress of the writing center. Moving the boundaries of any frontier is difficult because the pioneers get caught up in the mundance details of daily life and neglect to pay adequate attention to the necessity for continual progress. Although the history books are fond of making the overland treks of discovery sound vastly heroic, the pioneers would rarely have seen themselves as anything but common men and women. Folklore suggests that the great westward movements of pioneers were unified and directed, and that each wagon train had a Brigham Young who knew precisely when to stand up and yell, "This is the place." But we all know what it was really like on the frontier. The people never considered themselves adventuresome voyagers--only victims of some unhappiness or

injustice who were setting out in a new direction, mostly disorganized and with only a vague sense of where they were heading. They spent most of their time doing the wash, skinning hides, building campfire, and shooting at one another. They stopped their searches not because they had any sense of having reached the Promised Land, but only because they could not fix one more broken axle or climb over one more mountain.

So it is on <u>this</u> frontier. Monday is just another day with students to teach, tutors to direct, forms to fill out, mail to answer, budgets to compute. But gradually we are moving forward. As we meet, we find ourselves a motley group here on the frontier. We are psychologists, educationists, teachers of the handicapped and disabled, sociologists, Ph.Ds in literature, business writers, teachers of English as a foreign language, speech pathologists, scientists, and humanists. We espouse many schools of thought and owe religious devotion to many creeds, theories, and methods. We can be kind and generous, but also self-serving and prone to empire-building. We recognize a common enemy—often an elitist group of tenured professors who want to deny the existence of basic writers by denying the existence of the laboratory, who want to view composition as product rather than as process. But we cannot really get organized, partly because they <u>do</u> hold all the high ground. And, after all, we have clothes to wash, and hides to skin, and fires to build, and occasionally we find it necessary to take a potshot at one of our fellow travellers. But gradually, and almost imperceptibly, we will agree and disagree, fight and learn, and together take a few steps more so that the boundary will inch ever further west.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"A Writing Laboratory Model," in Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators, ed. Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel R. Hoeber (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), p. 63.

[2]Theories and methods that have been popular in the laboratory approach are represented in several books and articles. Among these sources are John C. Mellon, Transformational Sentence-Combining, Research Report #10 (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1969) and William Strong, Sentence Combining: a Composing Book (New York: Random House, 1973); for tagmemics, see Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike, Rhetoric: Discovery, and Change (New York: Harcourt, 1970); sentence chunks is a term that appears in Dean Memering and Frank O'Hare, The Writer's Work (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980); the pentad is a heuristic for invention that is found in Kenneth Burke's A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945); cooking as an analogy for the writing process is central to Peter Elbow's Writing without Teachers (New York: Oxford Press, 1973); a linguistic approach to writing is summarized in Francis Christensen's "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," CCC 14 (1963), 155-161; although peer-group tutoring is disqussed in many articles, the best-known is Ken Bruffee's "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth Through Peer-Group Influence," Liberal Education (1978), 447-468; see also Paula Beck, Thom Hawkins, and Marcia Silver, "Training and Using Peer Tutors," College English 40 (1978), 432-449.

[3]"Basic Writing," in Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographical Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth, Texas, TCU Press, 1976), p. 137.

[4]Shaughnessy, "Basic Writing," p. 147.

[5]E. D. Hirsch, Jr. "Research in Writing: The Issues," in Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators, ed. Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel R. Hoeber (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), p. 154. Hirsch, in part, quotes from Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

The Writing Center: Stepchild or Rightful Heir?

A writing center, or writing laboratory as we have labelled it at Amarillo College, serves one major function -- to assist students to improve the quality of their writing, a task that has confronted teachers and scholars since at least the medieval East Midland ancestral roots of our language. For a center to function successfully, however, there are certain obstacles that have to be met and conquered, obstacles that for the most part require a continuing labor of education and re-education. There is the obstacle of convincing the administration that funding for the center is justified, the obstacle of convincing the faculty that their support for the center through participation in its function and involvement in its maintenance is vital, and the obstacle of convincing the students of the importance of their utilizing the facilities of the center.

The first obstacle to conquer, and obviously the most important, is the administration. Without administrative support there are no funds, therefore no center. Administrators, it seems, have two main duties in the world of higher education: to find funds for the operation of the institution and, once found, to devise reasons as to why the funds cannot be spent. Since nowadays many institutions already have writing centers and the trend in the teaching of English is toward the establishment of such centers, administrators cannot often argue effectively against a center, but they can attempt to treat the center as a stepchild of education by shunting the center into an undesirable location, a

strategic error which can harm the effectiveness of the center. Therefore, if the present location of a writing center is undesirable, one should find a site that is central to the campus, that will require little renovation, and that is seldom used for anything else. Administrators are concerned nowadays with utilization of all available space, and a location that will utilize such space and that can be made attractive is ideal. As do most other people, students work better in pleasant surroundings than in unpleasant. Too, the taxpayers or the benefactors must get their money's worth -- a not unreasonable expectation in light of increasing administrative costs; and by locating a center in a space heretofore unused, the administration is happy, the money sources are happy, and, if the space is made attractive, the students are, if not happy, at least soothed.

If money is tight, another method to gain administrative support is that many, possibly most, of the materials used in the center can be created in house; thus funds necessary for purchasing materials will be minimal. Frankly, because each department of English has its own bias toward the teaching of composition, it has been my experience that there is relatively little material commercially designed and produced that will answer the needs of a particular student population. Commercial materials are generally too general. And, frequently, the emphasis on terminology is inconsistent with that taught at the institution; for instance comma splice as opposed to comma fault, subjective complement as opposed to predicate noun or adjective -- inconsistencies which pose little problem for English instructors, but which create confusion for students. I must

add, however, that the one or ones chosen to create the in-house materials must not sell himself or themselves cheaply. Released time or increased monetary compensation should be given to those who create the materials.

A third point addresses staff and equipment. Administrators are always interested to know how much money is to be required for salaries. Staffing of writing centers is really quite simple, because existing faculty can be used -- but more about that in a moment. Probably one full-time, or perhaps only part-time person is needed. Call that person a paraprofessional or a technician. Such appellations sound impressive and cheap. The technician is primarily a clerical person who handles the mechanics of handing out the materials and replacing them in order to avoid chaos. However, the technician can be trained also to check the exercises. In fact, at times, and perhaps quite often, more than one evaluator is necessary to handle the traffic, especially during those periods when the use of the center is greatest. The technician is useful too to fill the gap at the changing of the guard as one instructor leaves before he is replaced with another. And the equipment? Excellent writing centers can be maintained with no equipment except desks or tables and self-instructional soft materials, such as typed study materials which contain answer sheets so that the students can check their work. (However, one will probably want to include also a post test to be checked by the technician or instructor.) Eventually, attempts, usually successful attempts, can be made to include money in the budget to purchase equipment.

A second obstacle to the effective operation of a writing center is,

ironically, that of the departmental faculty. It goes without saying that a writing center should not advocate changes in teaching styles, whether the styles be traditional, mechanical, or electronic. To advocate such changes would create instant enmity. A writing center should serve as adjunct to whatever teaching styles the various members of the faculty prefer. The problem, if there is one, is not that of teaching styles but that of involving faculty in the use of the center. And here I must point out that without faculty involvement, an institution may have a glorious writing center, gloriously empty. Students will not ordinarily attend a center without gentle prodding from the faculty, traditional, mechanical, or electronic. The faculty must be participants. They must work in the center.

Our plan at Amarillo College is that each faculty member who works in the writing lab exchange one class section for six hours per week of lab time. Three hours for six at first observation does not seem a bargain, but when one considers that he will have one class less of themes to grade and quizzes to prepare, the advantage is obvious, especially if one's institution, like mine, expects one to have a normal teaching load of fifteen hours. And, in a community college, it is likely that at least twelve hours of the fifteen are freshman composition classes.

I have already mentioned one advantage to using existing faculty in the writing center -- the center is staffed without the necessity of hiring a new faculty member -- but a more important advantage is that the teaching staff become involved with the center itself, especially if

the instructors are rotated each semester so that eventually all teaching staff gain experience in the center. One's active participation in operating the center tends to obviate an attitude of "The center is over there, I'm over here; it can tend its affairs, and I'll tend mine." The more familiar the instructors are with the materials available in the center, the more likely they are to insist that their students use the center -- a not lightweight consideration when one thinks of influencing students to use the center.

One final selling point to the faculty, and perhaps the most worthy from their point of view, is that the writing center alleviates the necessity of one-on-one conferences in which the instructor spends most of his time explaining such basic writing errors as comma splices and run-together sentences. The instructor can send the student to the center to work on these problems and spend his conference time on instruction concerned with theme content, style, and form.

A third obstacle is the students themselves. The primary method which influences the students to use the center is quite frankly that of coercion. Perhaps the best term to describe the process is that of "subtle persuasion." One wants the students to think that they are going to the writing center voluntarily; that they have a choice of whether they go; that they go because they are scholars, not school goers. In reality, however, the students must be given a Hobson's Choice, because few students do anything voluntarily. And as for scholars -- well! Students may choose not to go if they so desire, but they must understand that to choose not to go will influence adversely their semester grades,

a persuasive argument, perhaps not so subtle, to insure the correctness of their choice. Their semester grades must be at least marginally dependent upon their use of the center. Another persuasive device is to initiate a referral system. The referral system is really ingenious, because it puts limits on the use of the center in terms of the course requirement by specifying for the individual student just how much usage is required of him in order to meet the requirement; and it gives each instructor a means whereby he can keep a record of the student's use of the center. Incidentally, or perhaps not so incidentally, the referral provides an excellent means of control for the center -- control of materials used (materials which, importantly, should be catalogued) and control of traffic into the center. No one comes without a referral. No drop in's who want to visit their friends and thus clog the carrels; no "Will you check this for me's?" who want the center personnel to write their themes. The referral also gives tangible support to the instructor's contention that, if given a referral, the student is obligated to go to the center: no referral, no course requirement; referral, course requirement.

Curiously, in spite of my flippant remark concerning the scholarship of students, most students do desire to learn; and, once they have been exposed to the center, will, for the most part, recognize, perhaps reluctantly, that the center does provide help with writing problems. Thus, the next time they are referred to the center, they will be less resentful about going. Also, when they learn that the material which they are asked to work requires usually no longer than thirty minutes

of their time (an important factor too in the success of a writing center), or, often even less time than thirty minutes, their resentment declines even further. I doubt, frankly, that a sweetheart relationship will ever be formed between the center and the students; but I do believe that a respectful relationship is often formed.

Ideally, a writing center should have several approaches to each major writing problem, because students respond, obviously, to different stimuli; therefore, a slide program on comma splices (I have discovered that the comma splice is the most common of major punctuation errors), a taped program on comma splices, a combination of the two, and a paper only program provide a variety of teaching approaches. And all will be utilized. It helps to have a media center complete with artist, photographer, technicians, recording and processing equipment, etc.; however, if one's institution does not have such a center, there are usually commercial businesses which will do the work.

In summary then, allow me to reiterate and expand to a degree some of the points already made. The writing center should have a reasonably pleasant atmosphere in which students can work. If a center is in an obscure corner of the basement of Old Main, dingy and gloomy, one should try to find a more suitable location. The best materials are generally those created by the teaching staff; and each lesson should be no longer than thirty minutes in length, shorter if possible. Also the materials should deal with one specific writing problem only. Many of the students who need the services of the writing center have limited attention spans. Finally, there needs to be continual review and upgrading of materials.

An effective writing center requires many hours of hard work and a little luck. But when the center proves itself to be successful--a legitimate child of education--well, and here I shall paraphrase our medieval friend Chaucer: What need is there to say more?

FUNDING A WRITING CENTER

Funding a Writing Center is one of the perennial obstacles faced by a Lab Director. For without adequate funding, a Writing Center simply will not be able to provide sufficient support to justify its existence, no matter how sound its theoretical or practical base or how ambitious its goals.

Located within the general scope of funding are two sub-portions, each so closely related that one cannot be discussed without the other. These two areas are budget and appropriation.

A well-planned budget will, in effect, blueprint the objectives of the Center's operation. It will consider the cost of staffing, proposed equipment expenditures, instructional supplies, anticipated maintenance, operating expenses, and indirect costs where applicable. Generally, a Writing Center's budget is projected for only one year at a time so that adjustments can be made on the rational basis of cost effectiveness, changing needs, and stringent, objective evaluation.

A first-year budget for a proposed Writing Center will necessarily be subjected to close scrutiny, simply because no previous experience can be used for guidelines. Funding sources--administrations or external agencies--must, therefore, be assured that the financial request is reasonable, generally asking only for support to produce short-range quantifiable goals. Rarely is a funding agency willing to commit monies

to a program which cannot produce some measure of success in a reasonably short period of time. A beginning Writing Center must, therefore, limit its first year operation to more modest projects than it will assume once it is established.

Controlling factors for inchoate Writing Centers can be limited to three categories: philosophy, size of student body, objectives to be reached. The philosophical bent of a Writing Center will be either as a supportive addition to the existing composition program, or it will be as a service organization which will serve the institution as a whole. If it is subsumed by the established program, its size will be relatively small and its role clearly defined. If, on the other hand, the Writing Center serves the larger institution--possibly including the community--its scope must be expansive and its role more diversified. The other two categories--size of student body and proposed objectives--are crucial elements that will determine the staffing and equipment needs.

After a Writing Center has completed its first year of operation, the Director will better be able to accurately anticipate financial needs and to submit subsequent budgets based on objective criteria. By outlining successful results and demonstrating a met need, the Director can confidently propose a defensible budget.

Devising a sound budget, however, is the less important aspect of funding. Having monies appropriated to meet that budget is the most

serious obstacle that faces a Writing Center Director. Funding sources can be separated into two broad areas: internal and external. Either or both of these areas are accessible to the Director, but serious thought should be given to the choice of one over the other. The funding source will generally determine how the Writing Center is perceived. And once the Director has committed the Center's funding to a particular agency, this perception is very hard to change. The vital connection between funding sources and the perceived role of the Writing Center cannot be stressed too strongly.

Internal funding sources may be limited to the supporting department or may be university-wide. If the Center is considered only as an adjunct of the existing composition program, generally its support will be the sole responsibility of the department. Some limitations are inherent in this situation: the Center's program will remain small, fluctuating with the size of the composition program. The staff, too, will necessarily remain limited, probably directed by a faculty member who has only part time responsibilities for the Center's administration. The advantages of this situation are that the Director's salary will be guaranteed and the cost of the operation will become a line item in the departmental budget. Ultimately, the funding of this Center will be available as long as the Center produces positive results.

A second type of internal funding is university-wide. This support comes to the Center that is service-oriented, serving the needs of the total

student body as well as those of the community. Again, the Center's size will be regulated by the size of the student body and its perceived usefulness, but it will inevitably be larger than any one department can comfortably support. This Center may be housed either within an English department or within a student service setting. In this larger operation, a full time Director will determine the Center's financial needs. The Director's salary will be underwritten by the university's administration, or primary faculty department, and operating expenses will be jointly funded by the school's administration and various departments. As with the departmental Center, this operation is funded through a line budget, although its future is not so readily guaranteed. The Center's viability may be questioned by many different areas, including some that may not grasp the need for such a center. While loss of financial support from one line may not devastate the Center, it will nevertheless cripple it and could initiate a domino effect that eventually proves fatal. Accountability and frequent communication are essential to the university-funded Center.

A third type of internal funding is the combination of the first two types: predominately a departmental Center whose core is line-budgeted in the English department, but which occasionally recruits funds from other areas. In this combination, the recruited monies are considered "soft money," useful, but not essential to the continuation of the program. With this situation, "extra" money can be had for additional staff, large

equipment purchases, training programs, and research projects. Sources of money include the general administrative fund, the Graduate School, or local grant committees. The administration is usually sympathetic to projects that enhance the university's community image and will provide funds intended to produce this favorable result. These funds may be used either for hiring additional staff, for equipment, or for activities that include public relations campaigns. The Graduate School can be persuaded to provide funds for Assistantships to be granted to students who work in the Center. Small grants can be provided for in-service training, travel to conferences, or specific projects. Often these funding sources can be used to reinforce each other and form the basis for securing more monies. For example: at the University of Alabama in Birmingham one small grant proposal was funded to conduct an English as a Second Language program called "Conversational Practicum for Foreign-Nationals." Its success led to an administrative funding of an ESL class. That success led to a request for a full time ESL faculty member. The university involvement with ESL has resulted in community support of several second-language programs offered at no cost to international students.

So, even the most modest Writing Centers, funded primarily by the supporting department, have access to many funding agencies within the university.

A final source of funding is external agencies: either state-wide or national. Because these monies are usually restricted in use, appropriated for a specific length of time, and above all, are not guaranteed, it would

be foolish to depend on them for the basic operation of a Writing Center. These funds should always be considered as an adjunct to the program, providing luxuries that would otherwise be foregone, but never as an essential part of the Center's operation. They should, therefore, not be budgeted within the general operating expenses to cover such essentials as salaries or basic operating costs, but should be clearly delineated for special projects or for equipment purchase. If one mistakenly came to rely on these funds for core costs, one might well find oneself out of business once the grant ends.

State-wide funding agencies include endowments often administered by banks, large corporations, or community groups. The Center's Director has access to these agencies either directly or through the university grants office. Proposals for funding can be made on the basis of continuing an existing project or as a request to fund new projects. Most local agencies and universities prefer that requests formally be made by a grants office rather than by an individual. A Director can check with the grants office about local funding opportunities and about the procedure for requesting support.

The two most popular and successful state agencies that fund requests for local Writing Centers are the Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy, and the Arts Endowment for the Gulf States. The first is directed by Walter Cox (Birmingham Southern College, Birmingham, 35204); the second by Robert Hollister (P.O. 54346, Atlanta, 30308). Both agencies require specific proposals, budgets, and justification, but both have a good

record for providing support. Guidelines for these agencies can be requested from their directors.

Federal agencies can be a lucrative source of funds, but there are also some problems involved. The initial problem a Director will encounter is selecting the appropriate agency for a given project. A grants office will be an invaluable aid in this task. Once the appropriate agency is located, the grant proposal writing will begin. Proposals must follow the prescribed form the funding agency provides. Appropriation of monies will be at the discretion of the funding agency and probably will not include everything that is requested. Once the money is appropriated and the project is underway, regular progress reports must be submitted to the funding agency. Evaluators will make periodic on-site visits to observe the program. Their written evaluation will be considered in any request for additional funding. The paper work, delay, and worry involved with federal funding may discourage some Directors from applying for these funds. If, however, the prospect of having these monies outweighs the disruption it will cause, contact the local grants office for a complete listing of funding agencies or check the Federal Register for a listing.

Currently, one of the most popular agencies for funding Writing Centers is the Support for Developing Institutions Project (SDIP) of Title III in the Department of Education. Several schools in Alabama are receiving funds from this program, including UAB which has been granted $450,000 over the past two years.

One word of caution should be noted, however. Just because an agency is authorized to grant monies does not automatically mean it has the money in hand. Before it can fund proposals, the agency itself must have its own budget funded. The federal agencies find themselves in a similar situation as the Writing Center Directors. No matter how sound a budget may be, or how needed the service, unless the monies are appropriated, the paperwork is useless.

Thus, we have come full circle. The need for a Writing Center is not being questioned. Rather, the question is how best to express that need in a financial statement that will ensure appropriation. The answer will, of course, consider the nature of the Writing Center itself, the population it serves, and the role it projects. And, its success will depend to a large degree upon convincing the funding source that it, too, will profit from its association with the Writing Center.

Overcoming a Financial Obstacle: Undergraduate Staffing in the Composition Lab

Surely one of the greatest obstacles to any writing clinic today is inadequate funding. In a small university setting with no graduate assistants available and financial restrictions excruciating, how on earth can we attempt to staff an effective writing clinic? At the University of Montevallo, we found an answer. First we hired a tireless, ambitious director who works 80 hours a week, and then--more importantly--we established a network of undergraduate English majors and trained them to teach basic composition skills. Our composition lab has been very effective and quite well received on campus, and our traffic continues to increase. Since I teach two non-credit Basic English classes and serve as an academic advisor for Special Services as well as direct the lab, we could certainly use a lab assistant. However, for approximately $900 per semester, we can hire the equivalent of a full-time assistant and reap more benefits.

I feel strongly that a well-trained group of tutors can do a much better job of teaching basic writing than another professional staff member. For much less money, we can have multiple personalities, varied talents with a willingness to work many extra hours, and--most importantly--endless patience. I would also like to explain how we select our tutors, how we train them, and how we supervise and evaluate their tutoring.

Anyone who has ever worked in a writing lab knows how effectiveness dwindles after two hours of intensive tutoring. Our tutors never work more than a two-hour time slot, and they usually arrive feeling fresh and enthusiastic. (I might add that the tutor who is leaving usually moves a little slower.) Good tutoring is tiring simply in terms of teaching content, but we also strongly emphasize the importance of caring about our students and conveying a warm, personal attitude to each person who works in the lab. This is where the variety of personalities and the endless patience become vital.

This semester we have ten tutors, and I'd like to give you a brief sketch of them. Michele is a very outgoing campus leader who loves to publicize our lab with attractive posters, letters to the campus newspaper, etc. Amy, like Michele, is a very cheerful sorority girl who encourages her friends to work in the lab; she works at least six extra hours a week and plans carefully for each student. Teresa is a very serious tutor who is

outstanding academically, and she never tires of revising our handouts which prescribe grammar exercises for individual work. Sandy is a very warm, mature girl who will do extra paper work for several nights in a row without complaint. Denise feels strongly about the humanistic approach to teaching, but she is reserved and works especially well with shy students. Martha is just plain beautiful--we often joke about how many boys choose to work with her--and her work is well organized and very thorough. Jill seems to be everything; she has a flexible personality that meshes well will all the students, and she is always eager to assist with faculty reports. Cathy, however, takes the award for excellence in record keeping; she actually enjoys it. Isabella, a Canadian, specializes in tutoring foreign students. Rodney, our "token male," is a freshman tutor trainee who brings a refreshing enthusiasm to the staff.

Most of the tutors are paid for four hours per week, but some of them are strictly volunteer. Isabella, for example, cannot be paid by our Special Services grant because she is not a United States citizen. Rodney is a freshman who is training under supervision, but he will be the next in line for any paid positions. Having worked part-time, I know full well the meaning of the old cliche about hiring two part-time persons when you need one and a half jobs done. Somehow, when students are receiving excellent training for their future, we feel much more comfortable about seeing them give extra time and effort.

Also, we find that careful screening of students seems to automatically render tutors who are willing to accept their responsibilities as paraprofessionals, rather than students who are clock-punchers. In order to qualify as tutors, the students must be recommended by a faculty member on the basis of their academic ability and their ability to communicate easily with other students. Then, during an interview with the lab director, the students must display a sincere interest in working with developmental students. It is also preferable that the tutors be interested in teaching as a career.

The training of the tutors can be one of the best ways to eliminate an obstacle to the effectiveness of a good writing lab. In a small department like ours with only 14 teachers, we feel that we can accomodate a number of different teaching styles and philosophies. The best way to accomplish that is to form a small committee of dedicated, experienced faculty members who

will participate in training tutors to teach within a reasonable set of guidelines agreed upon by the department. For our first semester, we asked the committee to meet with the tutors on a Saturday for four hours of intensive training. Each faculty member was asked to conduct a one-hour session in an area that he/she found important. We covered such areas as: confidentiality, English 101 objectives, effective teaching techniques, and suggested readings. Now that we have experienced tutors, we find it easier to meet with the committee several times during the year for consultation and guidance. The teachers discuss levels of formality, different methods of outlining, how much help tutors should give in various situations, etc. This is not only helpful to the lab staff; it gives the faculty a "stake" in what happens in the lab. It is their lab; we serve their students, and they should have a say in what procedures we follow. One development that has been especially helpful is that certain teachers who feel more comfortable with the tutors who studied composition with them will attempt to schedule their students with that particular tutor. At times, considering the variety of approaches to the teaching of composition, this has saved a lot of faculty time that might have been used for individual student conferences. It also promotes greater rapport between tutors and faculty since they often discuss an individualized program for certain students and consult with each other concerning their progress.

The lab director is expected to supervise and evaluate the progress of each tutor. I feel that this is done most effectively on a regular basis through informal conversations and staff meetings. It is always helpful to point out positive strategies that a tutor has used in a difficult situation; usually the tutor herself will follow with the negative areas that need to be discussed. Regular staff meetings enable students to blow off steam--an act that I find vital for lab staff. The meetings also enable them to share successes and positive feelings about their work. In a sense, they evaluate themselves and each other in these two ways; however, we are considering a more formal evaluation by the director at the end of each semester. The form will be placed in each tutor's file and will be used for immediate improvement as well as for future recommendations. We have always asked students who use the lab to evaluate tutors generally in the following categories:

1. Did the tutor really seem to care whether your skills improved or not? _____

2. Do you feel that the tutor is competent? _____

3. Did you feel free to come to the tutor with questions about your individual problems? _____

4. Do you feel that the tutor gave you personal attention? _____

5. Did the tutor give you adaquate information concerning your composition problems? _____

At present, we feel satisfied with our casual evaluation since supervision is almost constant, but as my duties outside the lab grow, we may need to become more formal with evaluation. At this point our lab has been in operation for a year and a half, and I feel that my initial supervision was imperative. With new tutors, it is still necessary to observe their manner of teaching and the feelings they convey to students. They seem to find it very reassuring that the director is in the lab or close by when they run into problems--whether it be an "I don't know" problem or everyone's favorite obstacle, the indifferent student who feels he's been diagnosed and sent to the lab with an incurable disease.

Our tutors also meet with the Special Services staff on a monthly basis for training in counseling techniques, efficient record keeping, and contacting students outside the lab concerning cultural activities. These outside contacts can be extremely helpful in building good public relations for the lab when they are done well in a low-keyed, friendly, casual way by attractive peers. Imagine how horrified students would be if they ran into a haggard, old lab director in the dorm or in the cafeteria who wanted to encourage them to work harder. Yet, our tutors can actually do this for us.

I would encourage any lab director to consider undergraduate staffing. It is economical, and both tutors and the institution benefit. Besides, these young people are exciting and make great contributions toward running an effective writing lab. They also add a lot of fun and happiness to my life.

The Problem of Change in Writing Centers

Things fall apart, and they do so pretty regularly in a Writing Center as anyone associated with one knows: favorite exercises mysteriously quit working, popular hours become lag times, examples become outdated, and computers and committed teachers burn out. In the past decade the Writing Center has adjusted to continuing redefinitions of writing, from product to process, from a way of speaking to a way of reading, from a mode of communicating to a mode of thinking, and from an English Department requirement to a cross-curriculum activity. We have all learned that change is the constant of the Writing Center and that, when things do not fall apart, the Center is too fixed. But this everyday uncertainty, which is essential, is not sufficient, much less efficient or comfortable; for this necessary flexibility undermines a sense of continuity in the program, in the people involved, and in the finances. We have a big problem, one which makes solutions to smaller problems only tentative and unconvincing. We need a theory to keep us from simply going in circles.

In this talk I want to explore the paradox that for a Writing Center to hold, things must fall apart. What is required is an approach informed by the theory of language as symbolic action which respects both the constancy and the change, both <u>good writing</u> and <u>writing which is good for</u> a specific writer, reader, subject, language, and context. As Kenneth Burke demonstrates, such a theory can encompass language as form--expressive, heuristic, writer-based--and language as information--transactional and reader-based. The theory of language as symbolic action is particularly suited to a Writing Center attended by students from all levels and disciplines because it accommodates all kinds of writing and all components of the writing situation, not just the text, nor the author's intentions, nor the audience. This broad theory of language also offers an alternative to the partial approaches to writing in regular classes.

The solution I propose might be called "de-centering," to use the term of Piaget that James Moffett and James Britton base their influential studies on. But aside from the fact that everyone nowadays is adopting the term, a major problem has developed gradually since its initial usefulness. Translated into a theory of composition, the idea of de-centering has led to the shift of attention from the text to the audience, whether fictional, as Walter Ong proclaims, or functional, as A.D. Van Nostrand practices. This shift which has led to advances in theory and empirical research on audiences as an heuristic, a revisionary force, a statistical variable, and a psychological reality, is only one aspect of the broader movement from product to process, from form to function, from decoding to anticipating and guessing, and from New Criticism to psychoanalytical, phenomenological, and deconstructionist criticism. All such moves comprise what J. Hillis Miller calls the "'paradigm shift' from a referential or mimetic view of language to an active or performative one." This shift from words-as-things to how-to-do-things-with-words has already occurred; not only are we no longer in the pre-paradigm stage, we can already see problems in the new paradigm.

One of these problems results from the exclusive focus on either making your own audience or becoming what your audience demands. These apparently opposite actions are similar in fact, for both deny the dynamics of communication. To use Burke's words again, it is the division between people that makes communication between them possible, and it is the independence of people which invites the dancing of attitudes. Certainly for Piaget, de-centering does not deny egocentricity; assimilation and accomodation are reciprocal processes defining growth. And Moffett and Britton do not promote de-centering at the expense of centering. For them the expressive function is not simply a means to the higher ends of transactional writing. Under Burke's dramatistic

conception of language such a distinction is transcended by the larger view of language as symbolic action and by the idea of communication between separate individuals. Likewise, the theory can accommodate writing as a mode of thinking and as a way of communicating. Neither developmental theory nor composition theory needs to opt for the image of self as changing and social or static and personal: the interactive, dynamic process between self and other which Piaget, Moffett, Britton, and Burke argue for provides a more efficient model for the teaching of writing in a Writing Center. And so, de-centering will not do.

Before describing what happens in a Writing Center informed by this theory of language, I must first meet the possible objection that a Writing Center does not need a theory. While it is true that in most cases when labs are first established the faculty do not explicitly define their theory--the situation does this for them explicitly--it does not take long before students, tutors, and faculty become aware that they do have a theory, that, in fact, people do not proceed without one. This realization may come about when faculty realize they are instructing others about how to write when they are talking, checking boxes marked "Comma Faults," and turning in evaluation forms consisting of numbers not words. Students quickly look askance, or knowingly, when those who profess that writing is meaningful do not write; faculty and students look at each other with embarrassment when the classroom teacher's comments contradict what the faculty and tutors have been preaching is good writing. We have all learned that the do-what-I-say-not-what-I-do approach does not work, for actions do indeed speak louder than words. But we are also learning, with the help of Burke and others, that verbal actions can often speak even louder. What happens in a Writing Center must necessarily reflect a theory of composition when language is perceived as performance, as action.

The theory of composition which informs a Writing Center which changes and still holds is, then, not a theory of audience, or de-centering, but neither is it a theory of re-centering, of returning to the fixed basics or to the written product. Instead, the theory of language as symbolic action is a broader rhetorical theory which conceives of audience as only one among many components in a writing situation. Therefore, we teach not only good writing, that which E.D. Hirsch shows is recognized by cognitive psychologists, textbook writers, and teachers alike, but also writing which is good for specific and different situations. We have found that our shift in emphasis, from the constant mixims to the contextualizing and transforming of these maxims in particular writing scenes, makes sense to students. Students all know one thing for sure: every English teacher wants something different, even though they all talk the same line about punctuation, paragraphs, and revision. For years, students have been taught the constancies of good writing, but the Writing Center seems to be a place which can respect the fact that, despite diligence on the parts of students and teachers, many students still haven't learned what they have heard and exercised about for years. And those who have learned them in one situation often lose their footing in new writing scenes. What students know and seem determined not to forget is that writing, like talking, changes according to the situation. Good writers are those who know that all the world is a stage but that there are many different performances.

But what does it mean, practically, to have the theory of language as symbolic action as the guide for a Writing Center? What does it mean to teach to the differences in writing situations as well as to the similarities in scenes? How can we help students rely on the rhetorical skills they have learned in living and in speaking without also encouraging "you know's," "well's," and other speech characteristics? Can students really handle the multiplicity of juggling intentions,

audience, organization, syntax, word choice, and on and on? Can they focus on the whole and on the parts? Finally, how does the theory of language as symbolic action allow the Writing Center to fall apart and yet hold?

To teach writing as symbolic action means that we help students to see themselves as writers and to understand writing as a meaningful action. In general, we do this by providing them a stage, or a scene. Again, Kenneth Burke provides the image we have found most effective:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to yourdefense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.
>
> (The Philosophy of Literary Form, 110-111)

Burke's image of the parlor stresses the social and playful aspects of language use, as well as the cooperative interaction between people. Central to the Writing Center is a roundtable discussion, where students read drafts aloud to others, respond to papers with questions, suggestions, and comments, where they discuss assignments and possible approaches and modes of organization, and where they read and listen. New students often sit quietly at first but finally put in their oars, unable to resist taking part in the conversation at hand. When a student reads aloud a draft to others, he enacts the role of writer, and the sound of his own voice allows him to become critical and committed to the part he plays. Likewise, students who hear themselves speaking critically about another's paper are performing the complementary role to that of writer, the role of critical reader of their own writing. We have found that this scene

provides an "enabling and ennobling environment," to use Janet Emig's words. Furthermore, with people communicating *as the center*, *individualized methods*, such as work with modules, computers, and audio visual aids, can be seen for what they are, the means to communication. In the give-and-take of the parlor, students realize the need for work on specific problems or strategies in order to perform more effectively where it counts--with other people.

Consistent with this basic principle of language as performance are several related principles. First is the idea that writing is rewriting, a rewriting of the self, of subject matter, of audiences, and of the language. But while each writing performance is different, each builds on previous performances; once students realize that self-expression is not self-destruction they are more willing to experiment, to try and to err. They begin to realize that mistakes in performance give insights; by reading aloud to others who respond, they are able to evaluate the various, usually contradictory responses and then assume authority for revisions. Because we believe that writing changes with the changing scenes, we encourage students to confront the differences head-on, and once again we do so by providing a situation in which the contradictions are central. The Writing Center, informed by this theory of language, invites students from all departments, from all levels of writing, and from all ages. Students who listen to papers on poetry, to lab reports, to history book reviews, and to letters of application have confirmed what they already know about language: that it changes. Within this context, they can then see the value of what remains the same.

We have found that to confine the interminable conversation about writing to the parlor of the Writing Center is impossible, for the word gets around. We also realize that there are other heated conversations in progress elsewhere. We have served as adjuncts to regular courses, meeting with entire

classes or with groups to work on the writing for that particular class; we have met regularly as one-fourth of a class and irregularly, and we have held the Writing Center in the usual place and carried it elsewhere. We work with graduate assistants across the curriculum, and we offer mini-courses on taking exams, doing research, and editing. Our theory provides coherence for this variety of symbolic actions and direction for other relocations of the Writing Center. We have sponsored bi-weekly series of public talks about writing by faculty in the University and public schools, by local businessmen, lawyers, and journalists, and by creative writers. An outgrowth of these public discussions was a course in the teaching of writing, asked for by public school teachers from all levels in the local district. The district sponsored the attendance of nine teachers, who in turn offered in-service to teachers in their schools and served on a committee to do an in-depth study of writing across the curriculum in the district. The nine teachers then became part of the "Teacher Bank" of the State Department of Education which is a resource for teachers in the state. The conversation has expanded even further into the Wyoming Writing Project, which includes a state-wide Writing Day, a holistic reading of the papers, and a three-week summer Institute on Writing, funded jointly by school districts in the state, the State Department of Education, and the University. The New Jersey Writing Project has advised the project, which has also been conversant with the Huntington Beach Project and the Bay Area Writing Project. In each of these centers, the theory of language as symbolic action gives shape and coherence as people--students and teachers--begin to see themselves as writers, to understand writing as rewriting, and to recognize that writing performances always change.

These various parlor rooms have given us many "perspectives by incongruity," to use another of Burke's key terms, so that we can see writing and our

teaching of writing more critically. The multiple viewpoints led us to realize the value of actually assessing our theory and practice through empirical research. We saw that students perform very differently in a Writing Center, to which they come voluntarily without the fear of failure or grades, than in a regular classroom. Therefore we devised three research projects to test our theories. First, we are testing the hypothesis that writing changes according to writer, reader, purpose, and context by asking students to re-contextualize drafts and final papers. For example, a student might revise a paper in which he played the role of student writing to a teacher as evaluator about the persuasive techniques in two ads. The student might assume the new role of advertising manager of Playboy and adopt the new purpose of informing the companies that, because of the increase in more highly educated readers, they need to change their ads. The questions here are do modes and purposes make a difference, and if so how do they? We assume that they do. We also think that students who are able to understand the motives in a writing situation--those of the writer and the reader--are able to write more convincingly. We think that the "grammar of motives" is a better starting point than the grammar of parts of speech or even of sentences, but we do not know. Our second research project is also a testing of the basic theory in that we ask students to revise a draft after they have performed a particular writing action, such as reading a draft aloud, condensing the draft to a paragraph and each paragraph to a sentence, and talking about the content and organization. We then examine revisions to see what kinds of changes occur after which activities. We believe that a rhetorical action, such as reading aloud to others, leads to broad revisions at many levels, while sentence combining, for example, results in changes at the sentence level. A third project also tests the basic theory that writing as a skilled action requires conscious attention and tacit knowledge but that

the relationships between these changes according to the situation. We began by using the protocal analysis method, developed by Janet Emig in her early study and used more recently by Flower and Hayes, but we modified it because we found that our students said what they thought we wanted to hear--what we had said to them. Very quickly they proved their rhetorical sophistication. In order to get at the points of decision in the writing process, those conscious and not, we ask students to change to a pen of a different color whenever they become aware of themselves writing. We interview the students afterwards about changes, and we categorize the points of change in terms of text features, semantic meaning, and rhetoric. Heated discussions about the research are interminable.

The theory of language as symbolic action provides a solution to the broadest problem of the Writing Center by giving coherence and continuity to the changing actions. We have found that such a theory is not only efficient, but with the things are changing now, it is also essential. In the recent Profession 1980, J. Paul Hunter opens a conversation with a new tone and different attitude towards the Writing Center:

> All is not, however, sweetness and light--or enrollment and FTE--in contemplating the Joy of Composition, and any euphoria about writing clinics as eternal redemptation centers needs to be grounded in some basic psychological realities and historical remembrances.

The negative tone is clear in "euphoria," "clinics," and "eternal redemption." Before the Writing Center becomes simply a sweet memory, those of us who believe that the value of the Writing Center is its efficiency in teaching writing need to make our case convincing. We need to keep oral and written conversations vigorously in progress, and we need a theory to keep us from talking in circles.